



**Report on Jewish Attitudes and
Practices Among Young Adult
Members of the Metro Vancouver
Jewish Community**

2009

Introduction

In 2008, the Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver released a report on the attitudes and practices of the Lower Mainland Jewish community. The purpose of the report was to better understand how people see themselves as Jews, how they participate in Jewish communal life, and what aspects of Judaism are important to them. The information contained in the report has been very helpful in identifying some key changes in attitudes and practices and recommending strategies to respond to these changes. However, while this report has been very useful in describing the views of community members 45 – 75 years old, there was almost no information in the report about those aged 19 – 28 year old, as this age group was virtually non-existent among survey respondents.

As “Engaging the Next Generation” is a key Federation and community priority, it was decided that as part of our overall outreach strategy, we need to specifically gather the views of young adults in our community – a demographic with whom it has traditionally been very difficult to communicate. This is what is presented in the pages below. Funding for the project was made available through Service Canada through a summer student employment grant.

Several other reports were consulted before designing the survey. In 2006, Federation conducted a study entitled “Young Adult Programming in the Jewish community of Greater Vancouver,” which helped enrich the programming aspects of this survey. In 2009, The Search Institute conducted the “Teen Voice” study which provided valuable insight into suitable methodology to canvass youth. The 2008 McCreary Adolescent Health report and the Vancouver Foundation’s Youth Vital Signs were also examined.

Methodology

Potential survey respondents were selected and contacted using three databases connected to the Jewish Federation. First was a mailing list of Birthright Israel alumni. Second, Federation’s constituent database, FR100, was queried for all young adults between the ages of 19 and 29 that had emails on file. Finally, Hillel Young Jewish Urbanites included our survey in their biweekly newsletter, which is sent to approximately 200 young adults – many of whom may also have been included on the Birthright or Database lists.

Respondents were polled using the online surveying website, www.surveymonkey.com. The choice was made to use an online survey because email is the preferred

communication method of young adults and because it keeps overall costs manageable. *SurveyMonkey* was selected as it is the most utilized online survey company on the web.

Potential respondents from the Birthright list and Federation database were contacted three times; the initial email described the purpose of the survey in detail and the two follow up e-mails reminded people to complete the survey and submit their name for the draw. As an added incentive, individuals who submitted their completed surveys by a specific date were eligible to win an "iPod nano" in a draw.

Of the approximately 1100 potential respondents, 116 responded, yielding a response rate of 10.5%. 103 of the 116 responses were 100% complete. While the response rate was lower than hoped for, the results do provide us with some specific trends which may be validated at a later date.

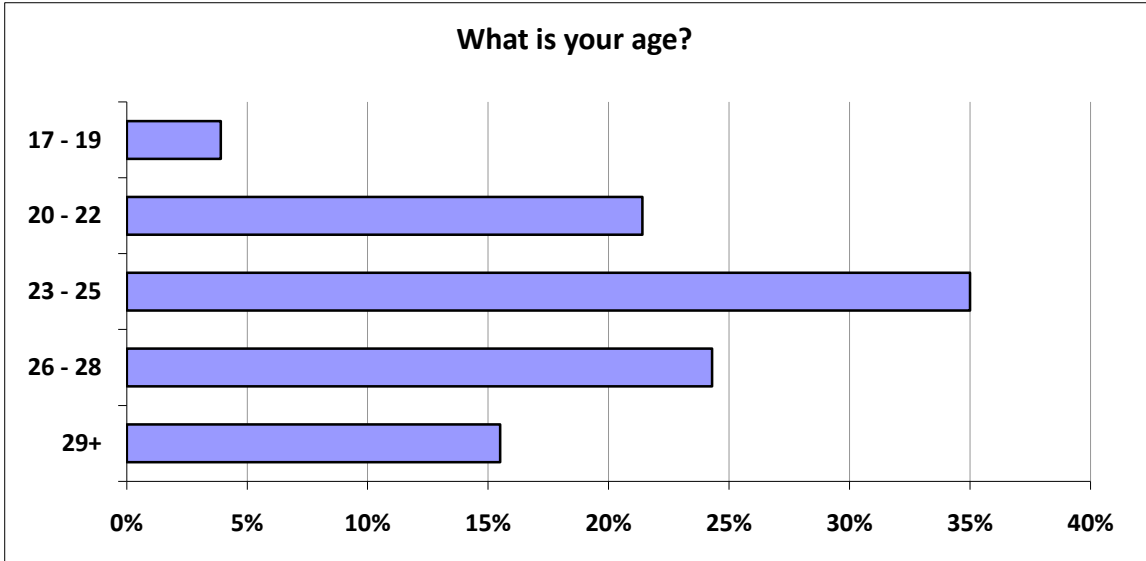
There are some limitations to these results. As with the attitudinal survey, the respondents were all young adults who have had some connection to the Jewish community and Jewish Federation. Most have gone on the Birthright trip, and as such, may have given more thought to what their Jewish identity means to them and likely have been strongly influenced by their experience on the Birthright trip. Also, many young adults who go on Birthright tend to become more connected and involved in community activities. And, like the attitudinal survey, more females responded to the survey than males – at an almost 2:1 ratio.

To deepen the analysis, the data was cross tabulated by denominational/non-denominational identity, student/working status, age, gender and where respondents were raised. Denominational respondents refer to those who grew up in Reform, Conservative or Orthodox or otherwise affiliated households, while non-denominational refers to those who selected the remaining five categories.

Demographics

Age

Survey respondents ranged in the age from 17 to 32 years, with 81% between the ages of 20 to 28.

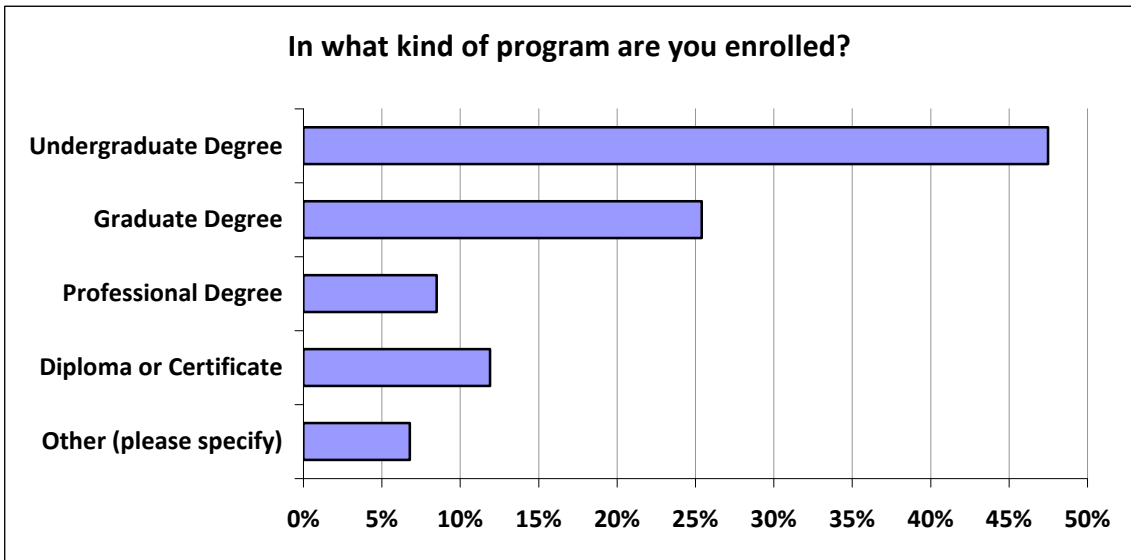


Gender

The majority of survey respondents were women: 64% female, 36% male. According to the 2001 census, the Jewish population consists of 51% males, 49% females. Thus, respondents to the survey were disproportionately female.

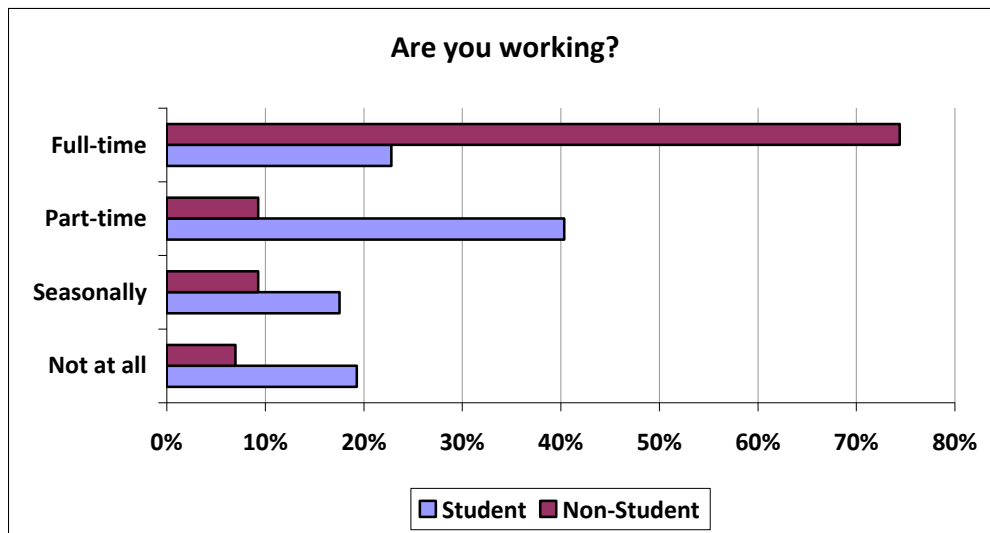
Students

56% of respondents are currently full or part-time students; 48% are undergraduates, and 34% are in a graduate or professional degree program. The majority of respondents attend post-secondary education in BC, with 27 enrolled at UBC, 2 at SFU and 2 at University of Victoria and 11 enrolled in a Lower Mainland college.



Working?

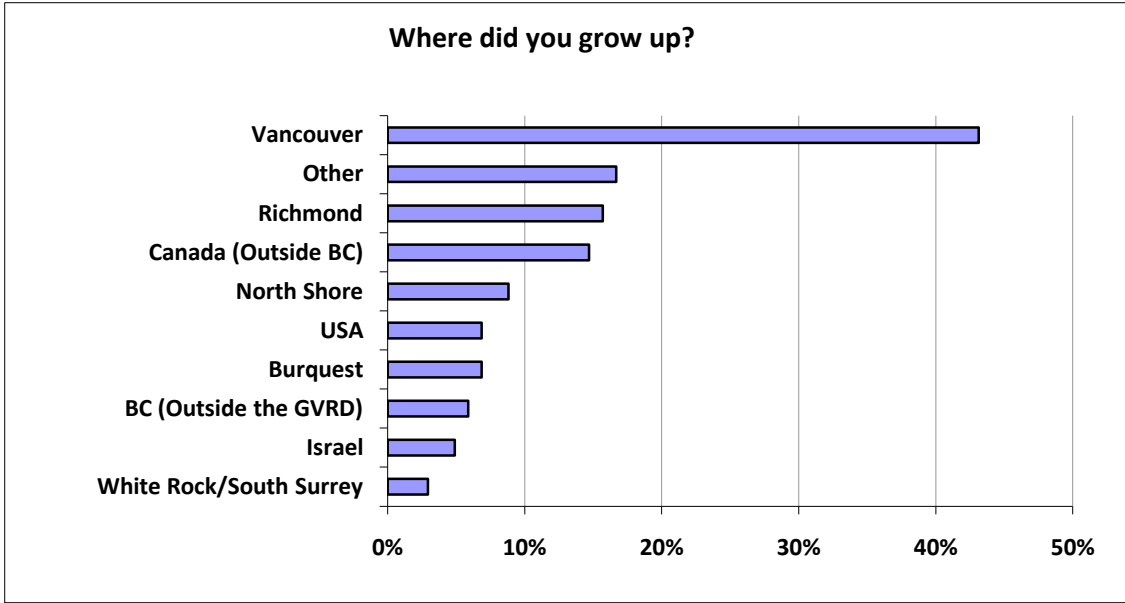
86% of the survey respondents work. 45% of respondents work full time, 27% part-time and 14% seasonally, with the remainder not working at all. These numbers may not be an accurate reflection of the employment status of respondents as the survey was conducted during the summer months when many had full time summer jobs. Overall, only 24% of the students hold fulltime jobs compared to 74% of non-students.



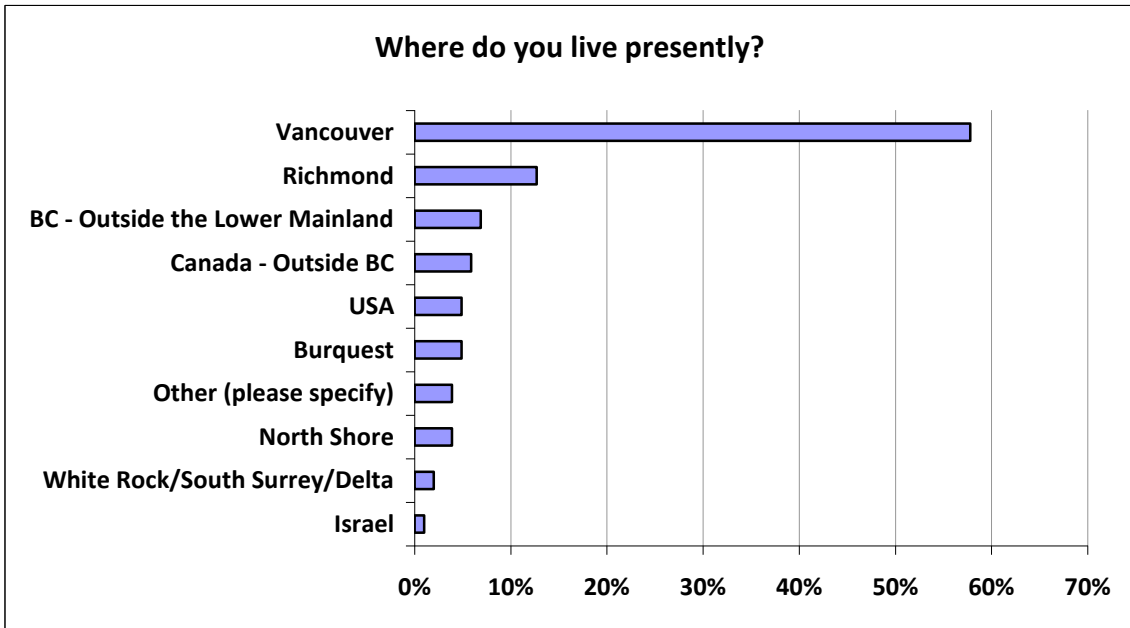
Young adults are working in a variety of sectors, with the largest number employed in health care and education. See appendix B for the complete list

Geographic Representation

The majority of respondents were raised in Metro Vancouver; approximately 16% came from other parts of Canada and the US and 14% of respondents were born outside of North America.

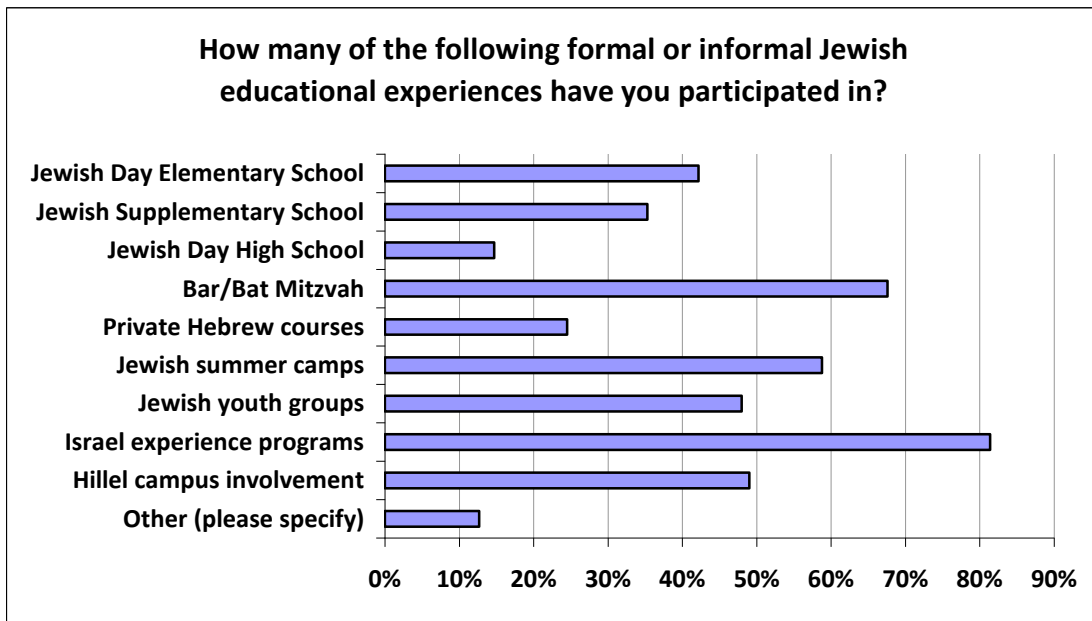


Respondents were also asked where they live currently. While all respondents have some link to Vancouver, some go to school elsewhere or are living outside the city for the summer.



Formal and Informal Jewish Education

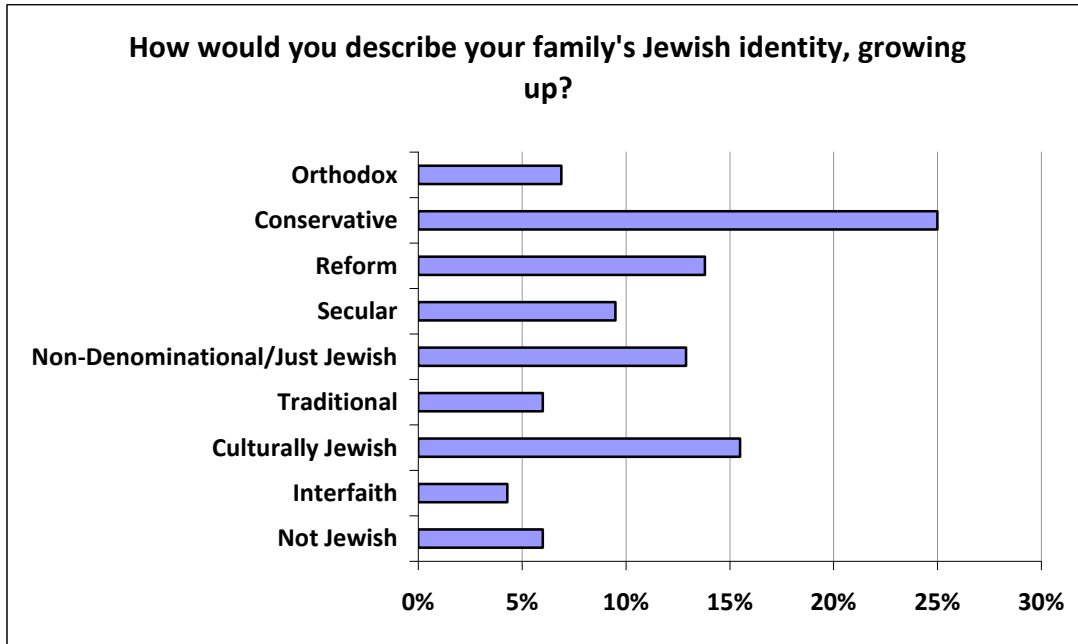
Survey respondents were well represented in the formal and informal Jewish education systems, with approximately 80% attending Jewish Day or Supplementary schools and almost 60% reporting attendance at Jewish summer camp.



Jewish Identity

How were they raised?

Respondents grew up in a variety of Jewish households, both denominationally affiliated and non-affiliated. 46% of respondents were raised in denominational homes, 44% were raised non-denominationally and the remaining 10% grew up in interfaith homes or non-Jewish homes (and converted later). These results closely match the 2008 demographic survey which recorded 50% of adults self-identifying as denominationally identified/affiliated.



Respondents were asked how their Jewish identity differs from their parents. The data reveals a variety of responses. Some are more observant than their parents and some are less. Some are more involved in the community, some are less. However, four themes emerge:

- 1) Many respondents described their parents' lives as revolving around their Judaism, in the form of Jewish friends, Friday night dinners, attending synagogue etc. In contrast, the respondents noted that their Judaism tends to make up only a part of their identity, and as a result, they have many non-Jewish friends and are less immersed in the community than their parents.

"For my parents they have lived their lives with the knowledge in the forefront of their minds that they are Jewish. It informs the way they interact with the media, other people and themselves. For me, I think my identity has been informed by many other signifiers beyond 'Jewish' such as 'feminist', 'student', 'Libertarian' etc."

- 2) Many respondents question their parents' attitudes and practices in relation to Jewish life and indicated that they are still exploring their Jewish identities.

"I'm still exploring mine, and they [my parents] pretty much have their fully established"

"I'm more about spirituality. They just go through the motions b/c that's how they've always done it. I won't go to services unless it spiritually moves me. They go all the time. "

- 3) Most respondents commented on the important role that Israel has played in shaping their identity

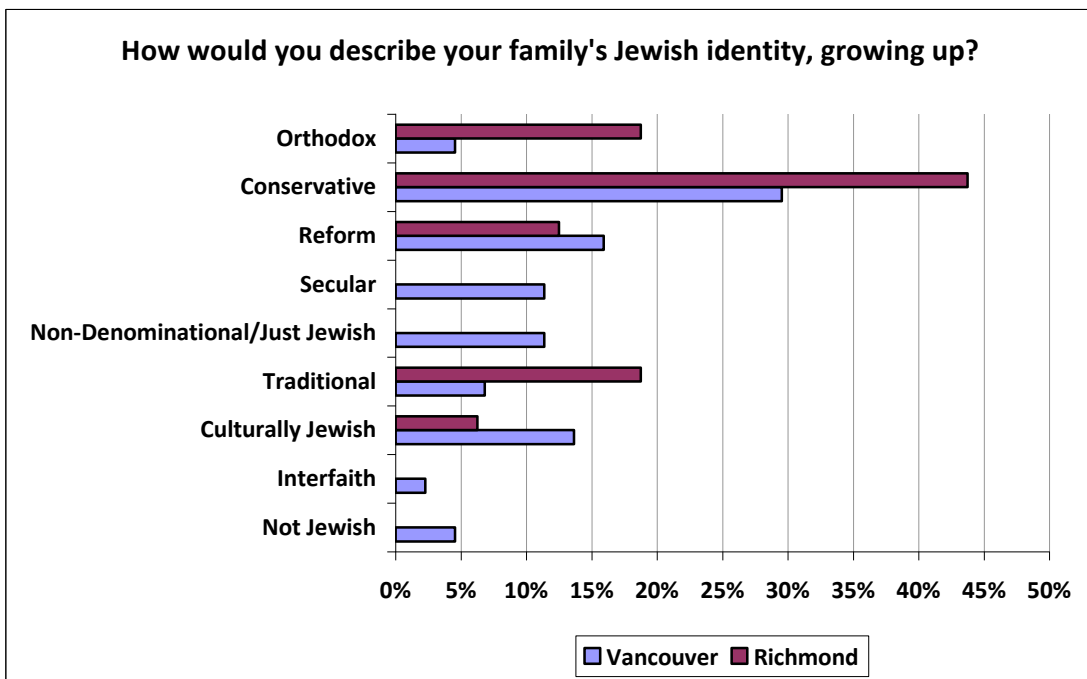
"I had the opportunity to visit Israel and they have not yet done so. I feel that my Israel experience shaped my identity tremendously- it was a unique personal experience that has made me more passionate about my heritage and how I can educate my parents about things they may not know."

- 4) Respondents were committed to openness and pluralism. Many saw themselves as less rigid in their Judaism than their parents, identifying more strongly with the cultural side rather than the religious aspect.

"I don't have as strong of a need to marry a Jewish partner. I feel more attached to Judaism as a cultural identity, whereas for them I think it is more of a religious identity."

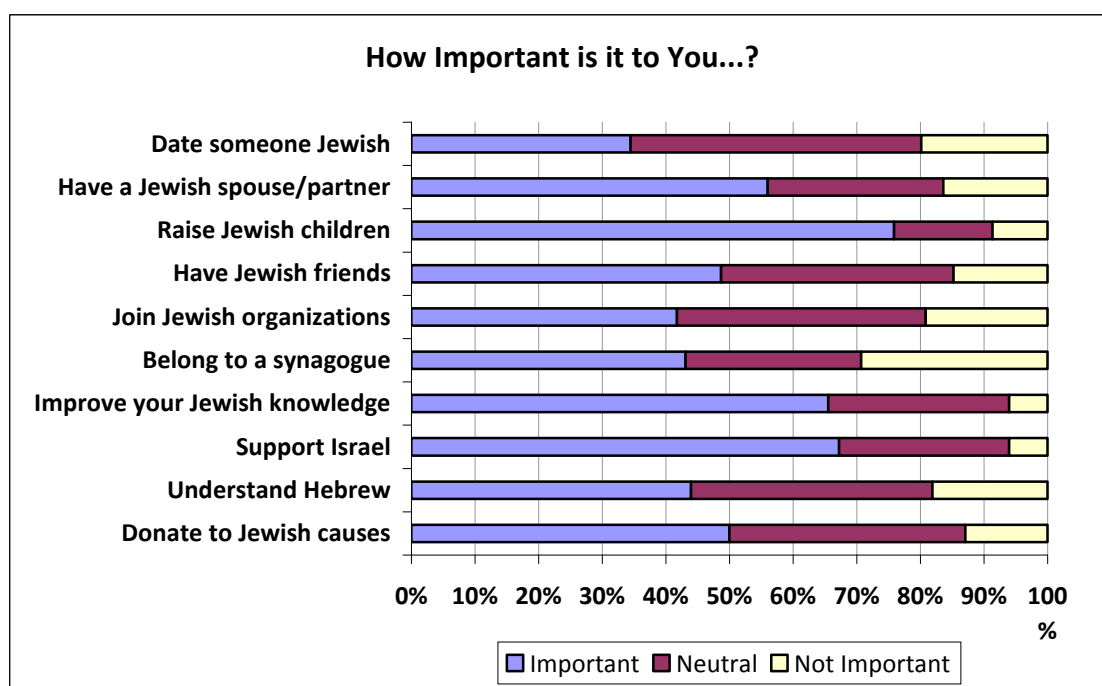
"I incorporate more elements of traditional Judaism (i.e. ritual, prayer, etc.) but with progressive values (i.e. interfaith relationships)."

One interesting result from the data was that respondents who grew up in Richmond were far more likely to identify as denominational, conservative and orthodox, in particular, than those from Vancouver. This may be because Jews in Richmond are more likely to affiliate, or simply due to some unidentified sampling bias.



Jewish Values

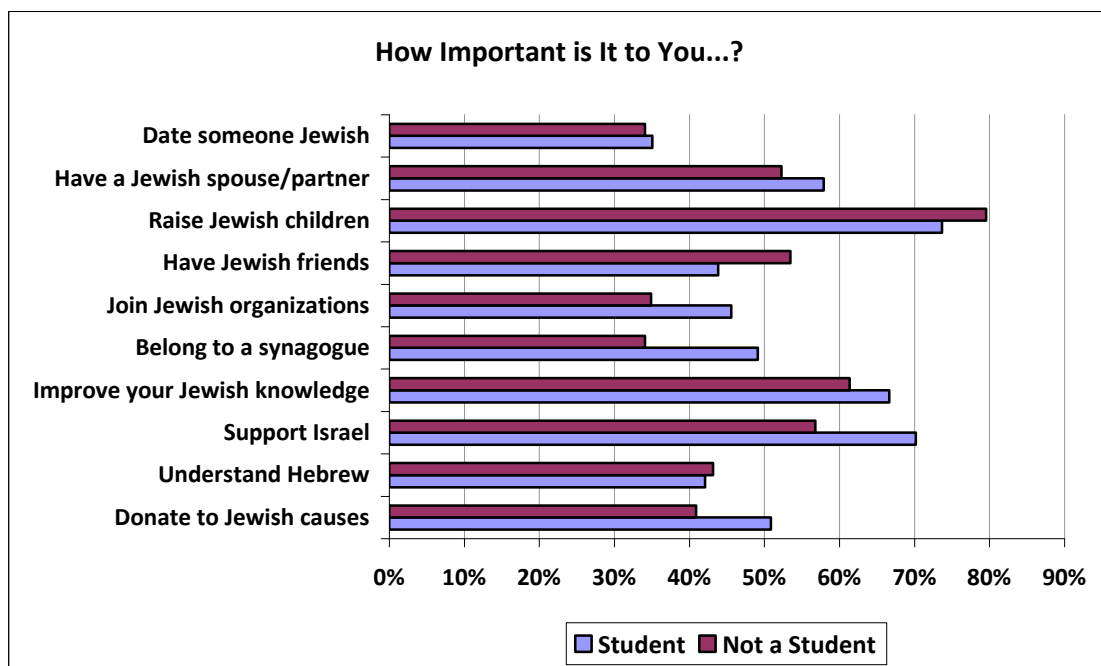
Respondents were asked to rank the importance of various Jewish lifestyle matters to them. *Raising Jewish children, improving Jewish knowledge and supporting Israel* were rated most important. Items rated least important were *joining a synagogue, joining Jewish organizations and dating someone Jewish*. An interesting trend can be seen with this ranking. *Dating someone Jewish* is the least important matter, while *marrying Jewish* is more important and *raising Jewish children* tops the list as the most important. This raises an interesting question about how young adults expect to date non-Jews and yet, hope to raise a Jewish family and have a Jewish spouse when dating Jews has so little importance to them.



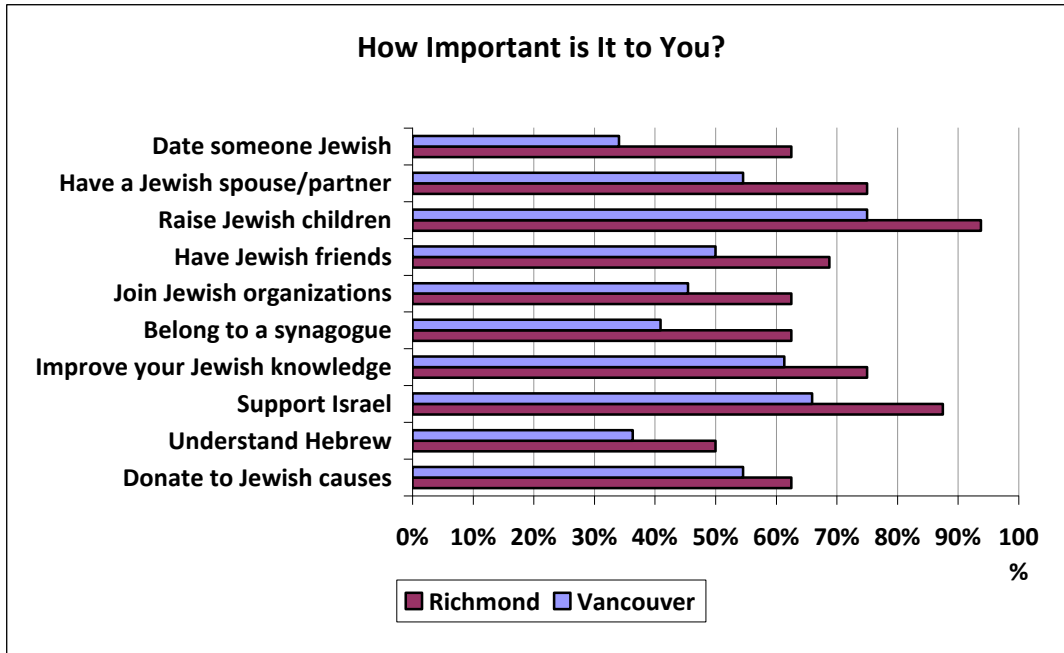
The items, in order of decreasing importance:

Raise Jewish children	75.9%
Support Israel	67.2%
Improve your Jewish knowledge	66.1%
Have a Jewish spouse/partner	56.0%
Donate to Jewish causes	50.0%
Have Jewish friends	48.3%
Understand Hebrew	44.0%
Belong to a synagogue	43.5%
Join Jewish organizations	41.4%
Date someone Jewish	34.5%

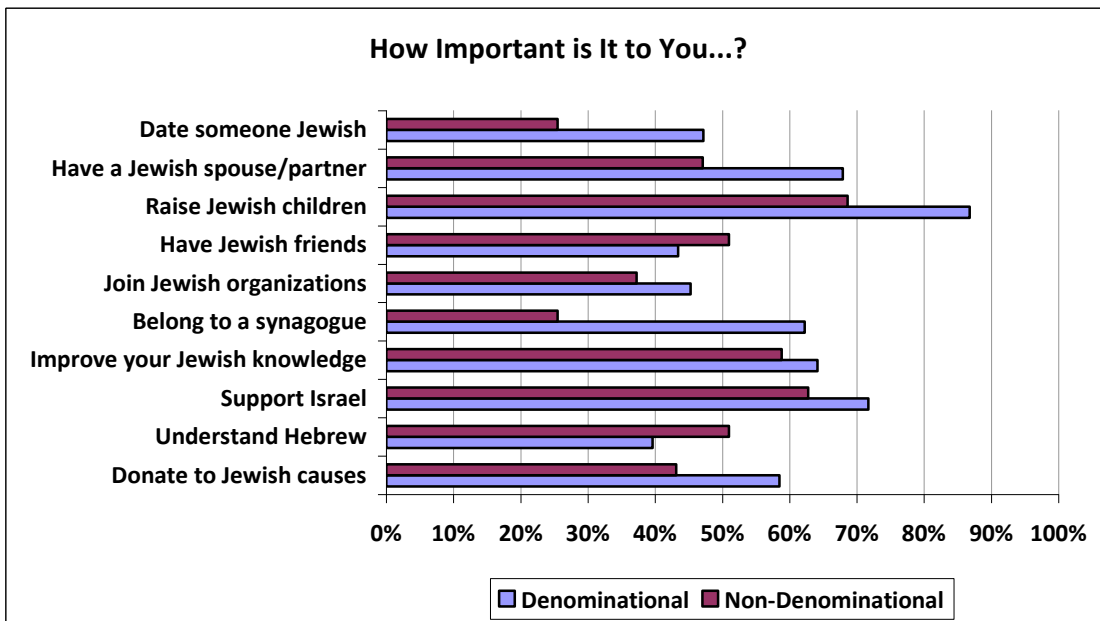
The responses were then cross-tabulated to compare the attitudes of students to those who are now working. Students consider it more important to *join Jewish organizations* (46% of students find it important compared to 35% of non-students), *belong to a synagogue* (49% to 34%) and *support Israel* (70 to 57%), while non-students consider *raising Jewish children* (80% to 74%) and *having Jewish friends* (53% to 44%) more important than students. These differences likely reflect the stage of life that each group is in. Students tend to be more involved in Hillel and other Jewish organizations that have heavy involvement in Israel advocacy, where as non-students tend to be less involved in the community and more focused on building their careers and starting families.



Again, differences were noticed in the answers received from respondents who grew up in Vancouver versus Richmond. In every metric, respondents who grew up in Richmond considered the item more important than those from Vancouver for an average difference of 18%. This is consistent with the denominational trend noticed earlier. Not only did more Richmond respondents grow up in denominational homes, but they tended to rate these Jewish lifestyle issues higher than their Vancouver counterparts.



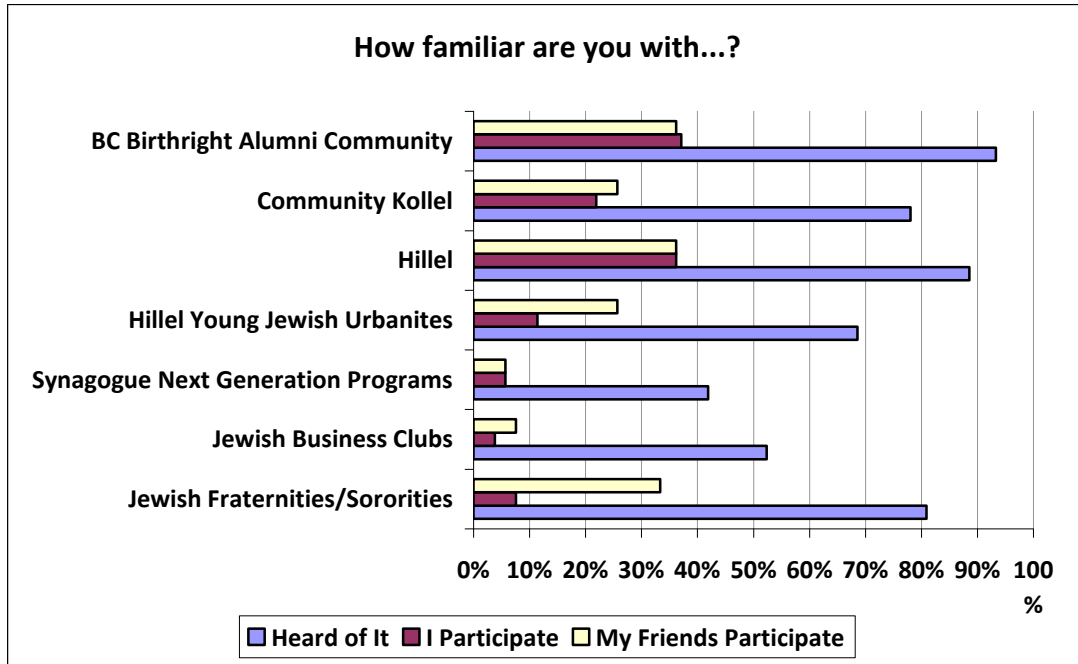
These responses were also cross-tabulated with denominational identity. As expected, denominational respondents tended to place more importance on these lifestyle issues than those who grew up in non-denominational homes.



Jewish Programming & Services

Involvement

Respondents were asked how familiar they were with various Jewish organizations in the Lower Mainland. The graph below illustrates the results. Note that the BC Birthright Alumni Community was particularly well-known because of the large proportion of respondents who have been on Birthright.



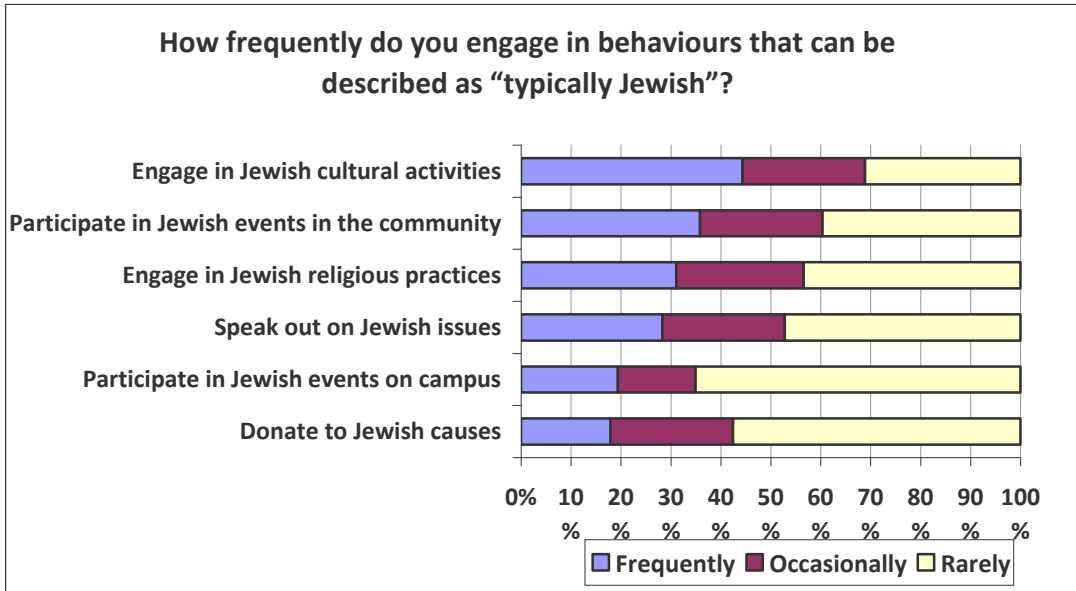
Ranked, from most to least heard of:

BC Birthright Alumni Community	93.3%
Hillel	88.6%
Jewish Fraternities/Sororities	81.0%
Community Kollel	78.1%
Hillel Young Jewish Urbanites	68.6%
Jewish Business Clubs	52.4%
Synagogue Next Generation Programs	41.9%

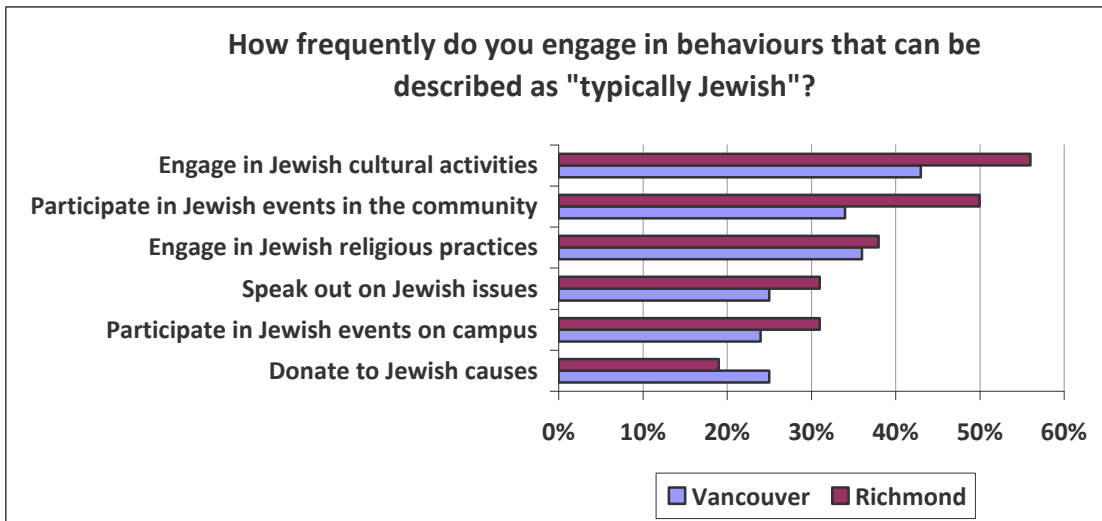
Overall, there was a very high rate of recognition of these groups among respondents, with over 40% selecting Synagogue Next Generation Programs, the least well known category on the list.

Engage in Jewish activities

Respondents were asked how frequently they engage in behaviors that can be described as typically Jewish. Of the six choices listed below, *Engage in Jewish cultural activities* was the activity most frequently selected, with 44% of responses. *Donate to Jewish causes* and *participate in Jewish events on campus* were least frequently selected.

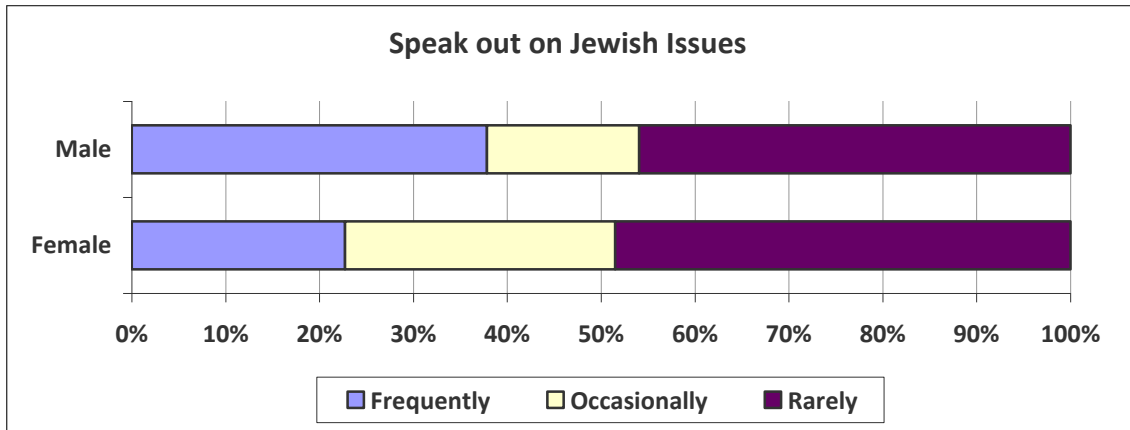


Differences were once again noted between responses from Richmond versus Vancouver. Richmonders indicated a higher level of frequency for every item except *donate to Jewish causes*.



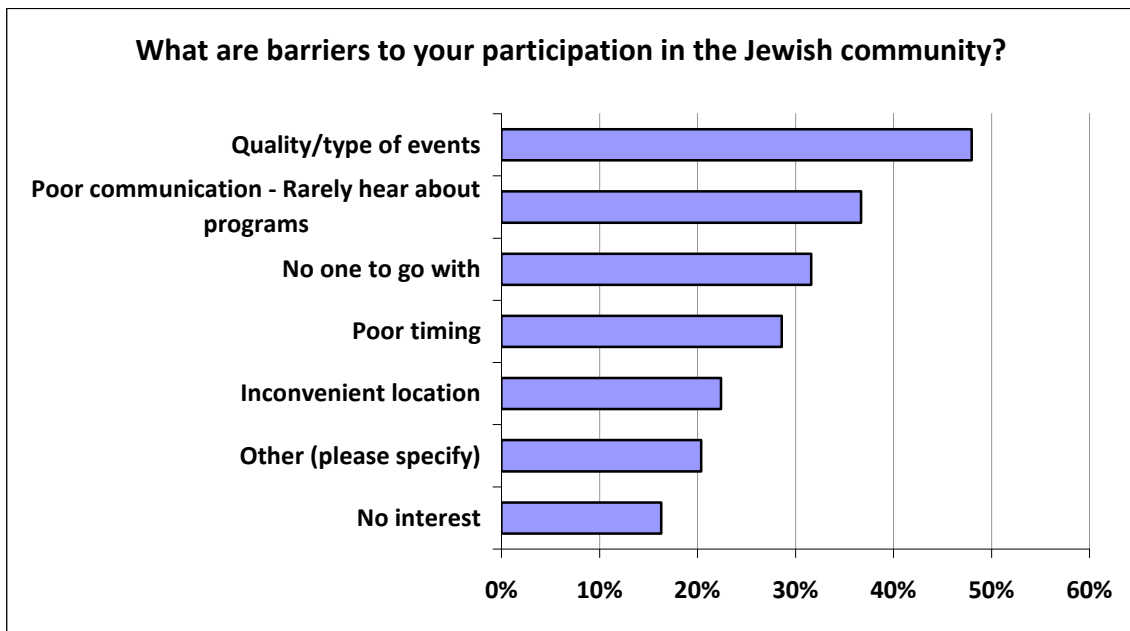
Speak out on Jewish Issues

Not surprisingly, male respondents indicated they *speak out on Jewish issues* more than their female counterparts. 30% of males say they speak out frequently, versus 22% of females. This issue needs to be explored more fully to determine if there are aspects of Jewish advocacy that are more comfortable for young women.

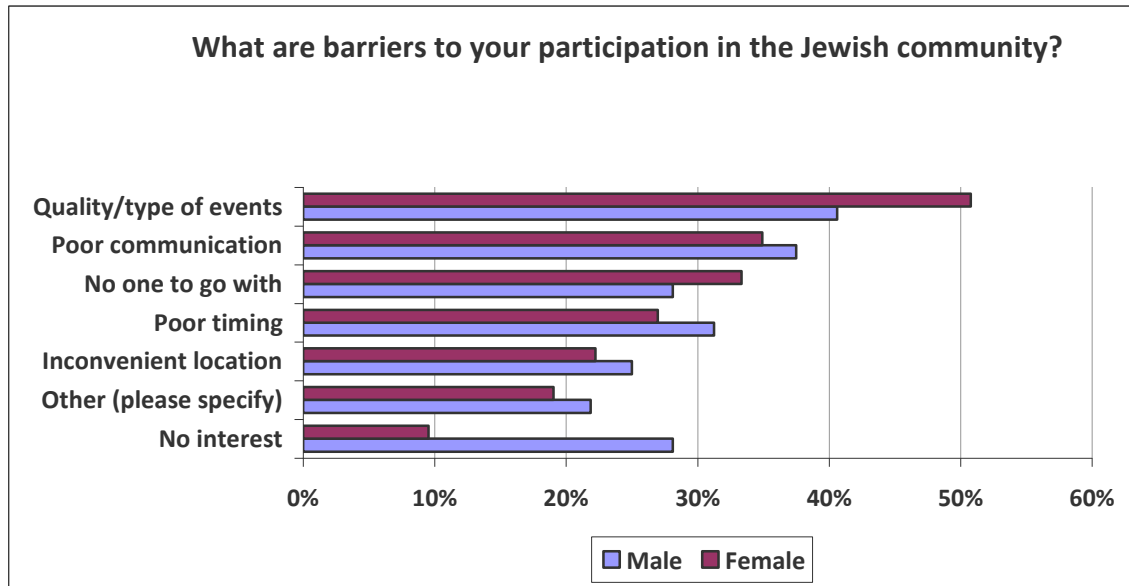


Barriers to Participation

Respondents were asked to indicate what the biggest barriers were to their participation. Almost 50% of respondents selected quality/type of events. Some respondents selected other and their responses ranged from “the cliquy atmosphere of many Jewish groups” to the “lack of events targeted towards specific identity groups.”



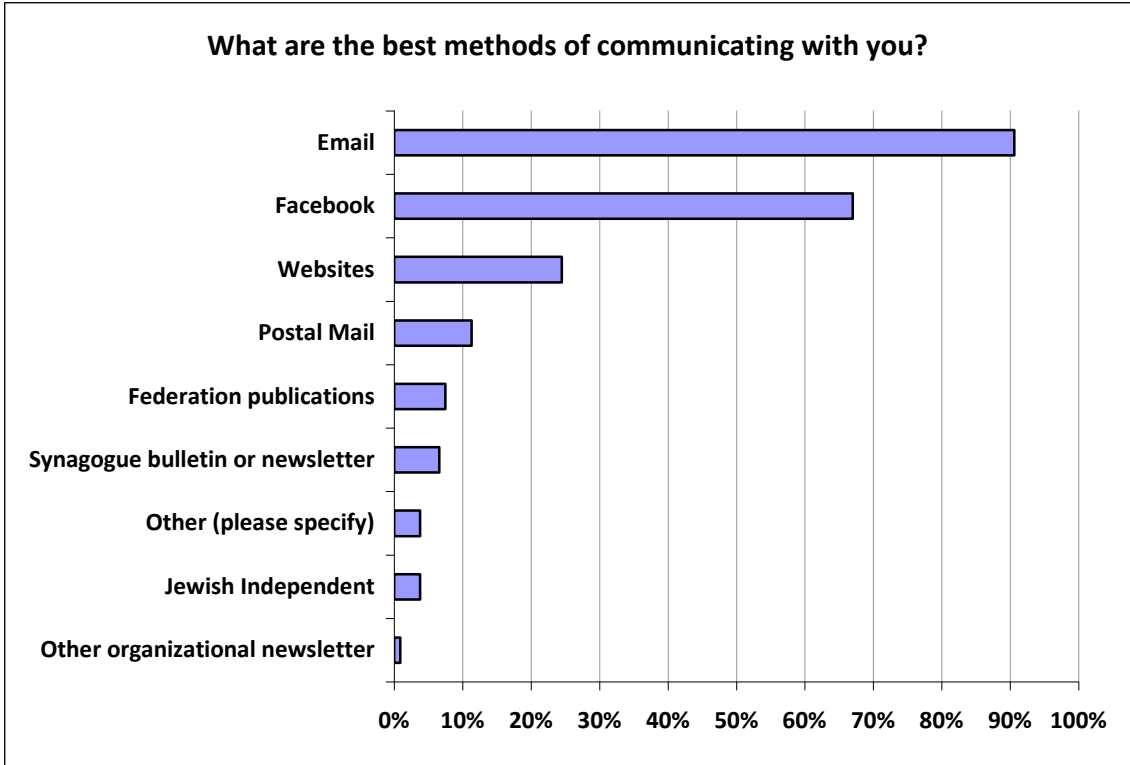
Males and females identified many similar barriers to their participation in the community. Both males and females identified *quality/type of events* and poor communication as the two major barriers. The most significant difference emerges with the 28% of males who selected *no interest* compared to 9% of the females. Part of the reason for this response may be attributed to the fact that young females are more likely to be “joiners” than young males.



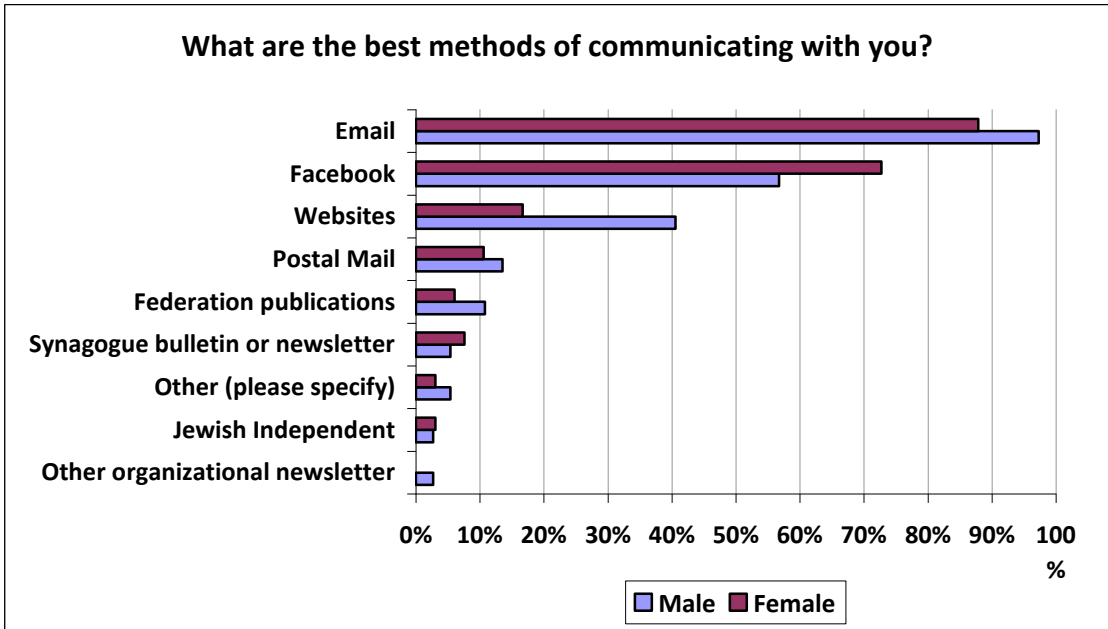
Respondents were asked for their suggestions about possible activities they would be interested in. 20 respondents requested additional Jewish educational programming such as current events in Israel, Hebrew and Jewish history; 19 respondents called for more social programs like pub nights and dinners. Some of these respondents also wanted to participate in groups tailored more closely to their lives – business groups, Lesbian/Gay groups, etc. 17 respondents requested more activity-oriented events such as hiking, camping, sporting events and go-karting. Only 5 respondents requested more religious events such as Shabbat dinners and holiday celebrations.

Communication

Respondents confirmed that the best methods for communicating with them are through email (91%) and Facebook (67%). Websites were a distant third (25%).

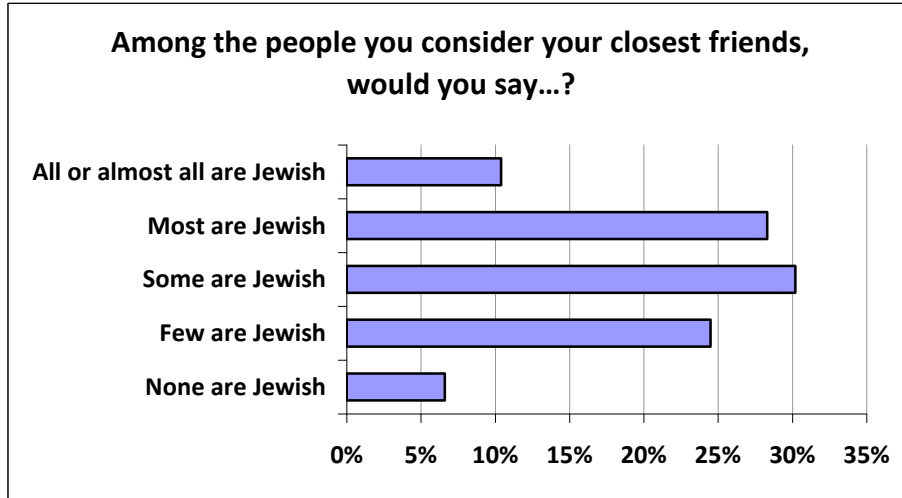


Differences between genders exist in the way they prefer to be contacted. Males prefer using email (97% versus 88%) and websites (41% versus 17%), while females prefer Facebook (57% to 73%).

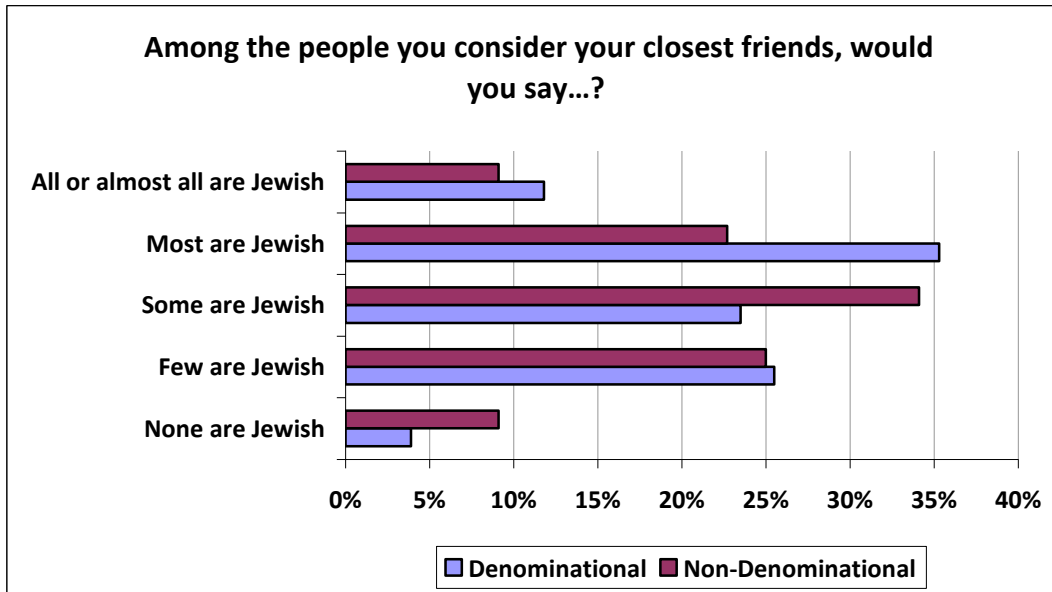


Friendships

Respondents were asked about their Jewish friendships. Responses were very balanced, with the plurality responding *some are Jewish*.



Respondents who grew up in denominational homes (orthodox, conservative, reform) tend to have significant more Jewish friends than those who grew up in non-denominational homes.



Respondents were then asked why their friends are or aren't Jewish. Responses from those who selected *most are Jewish* or *all or almost all are Jewish* centered around two themes:

- 1) Respondents went to Jewish day schools, were involved in Jewish clubs and social groups and their social circles developed as such

From Talmud Torah, I have stayed in touch and remained very close with many of the people I went to school with. They're not all Jewish because I went to a public high school and made other friends, although I remain close with all my Jewish friends.

"I went to Talmud Torah and Camp Solomon Schechter, participated in USY, have remained in touch with many of those friends and have some of them as my closest friends."

- 2) Respondents have a better cultural connection to Jews than non-Jews

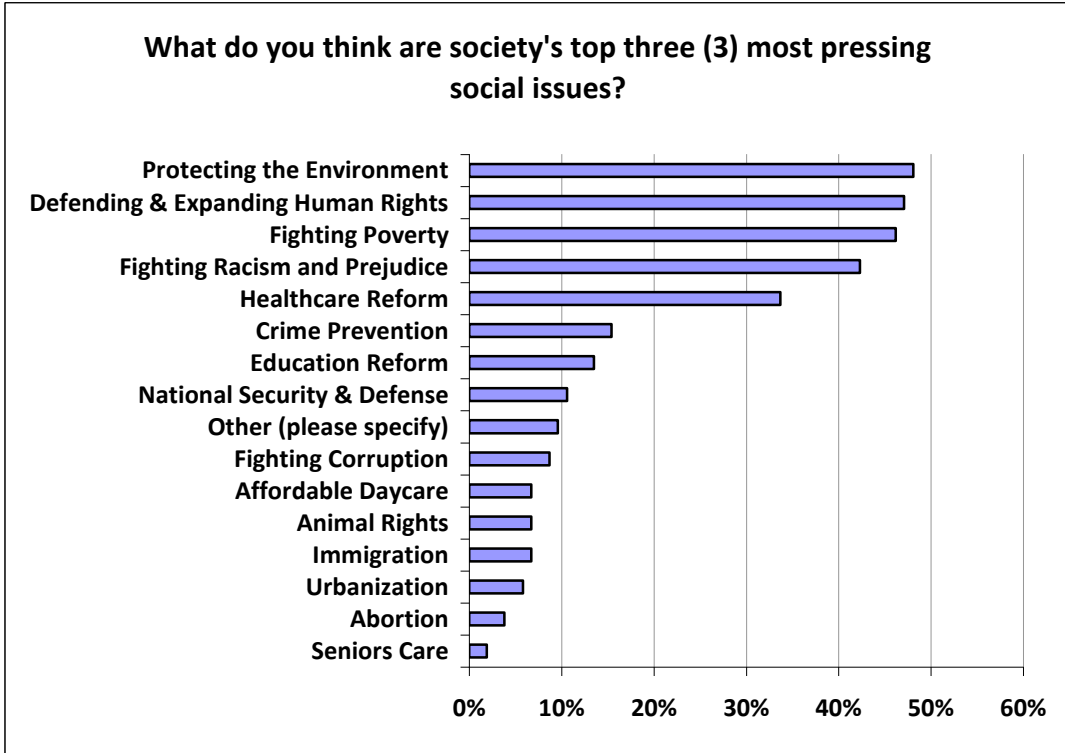
"It just seems that the Jewish people I have become friends with, seem to stick a lot better than my non-Jewish friends. I think its mainly because we have similar interests, and we have that "Jewish connection" that cannot be explained."

Respondents who selected *few are Jewish* or *none are Jewish* mostly discussed the scarcity of Jews around them when they grew up and at the present.

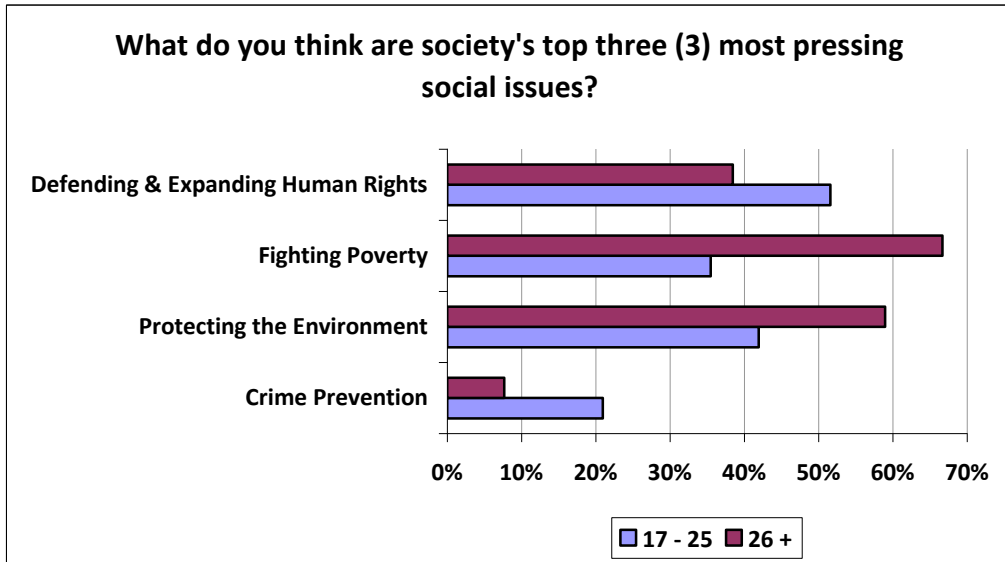
"I live in Burnaby, no other Jewish people I know live close."

Social Issues

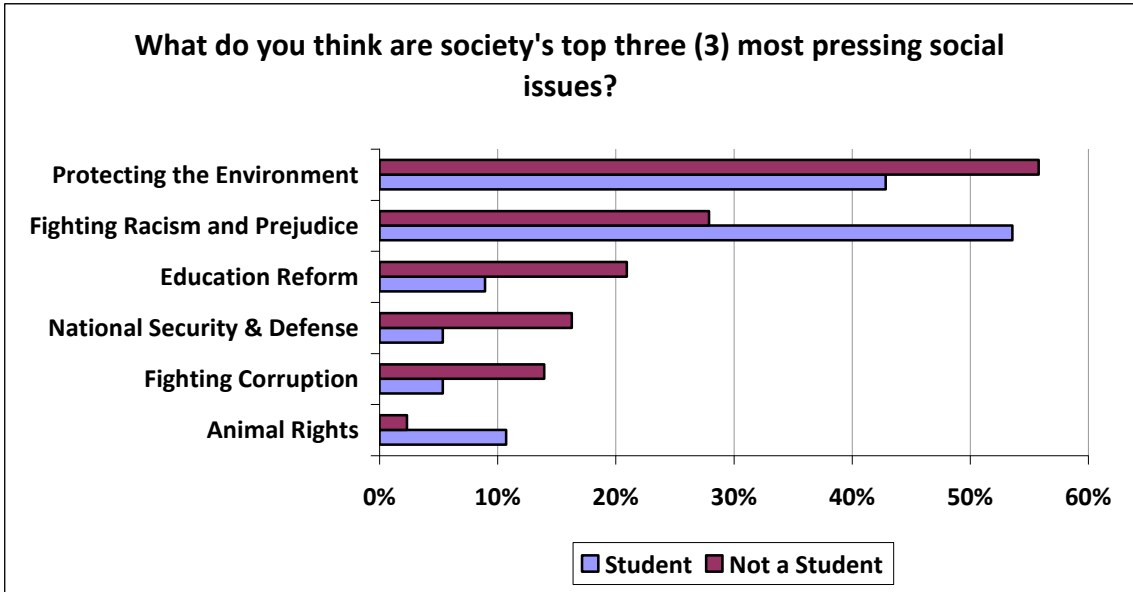
Respondents selected what they think are society's top three most pressing social issues. The four most popular choices were *Protecting the Environment* (48% of respondents), *Defending and Expanding Human Rights* (47%), *Fighting Poverty* (46%) and *Fighting Racism and Prejudice* (42%).



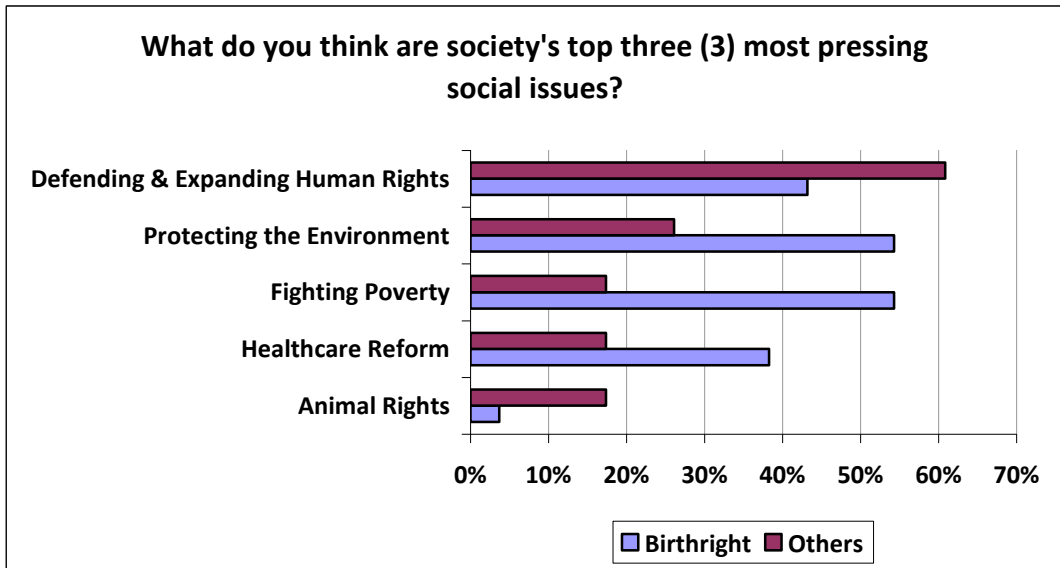
Responses were cross-tabulated by age. Those 26 and older prioritize *protecting the environment* and *fighting poverty*, where as those under 26 put an emphasis on *crime prevention* and *defending and expanding human rights*.



Significant differences were noted between the answers of students and non-students. 54% of students consider *fighting racism and prejudice* one of society's most pressing issues, while only 28% of non-students do.

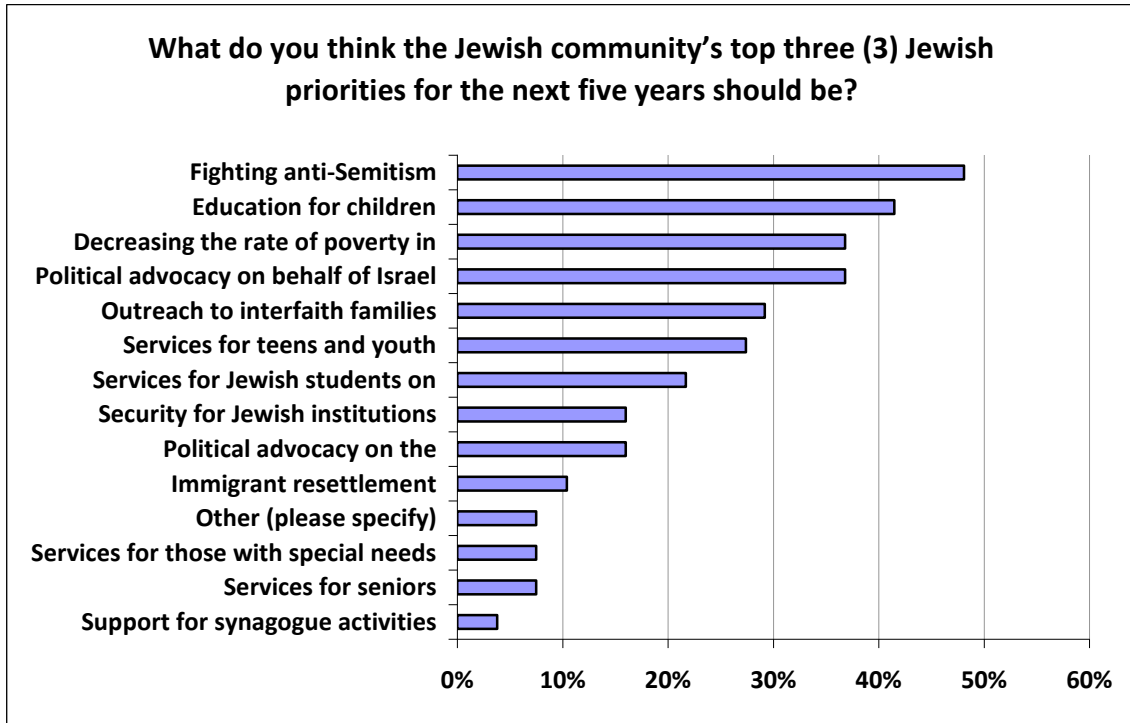


Disparities were also noted between Birthright participants and the remaining respondents. A likely cause is the diversity of Birthright participants versus the relative uniformity of the other respondents. While Birthright respondents tend to represent Jews from all areas of the community, respondents contacted through HYJU and our existing database lists are likely more involved than Birthright participants.

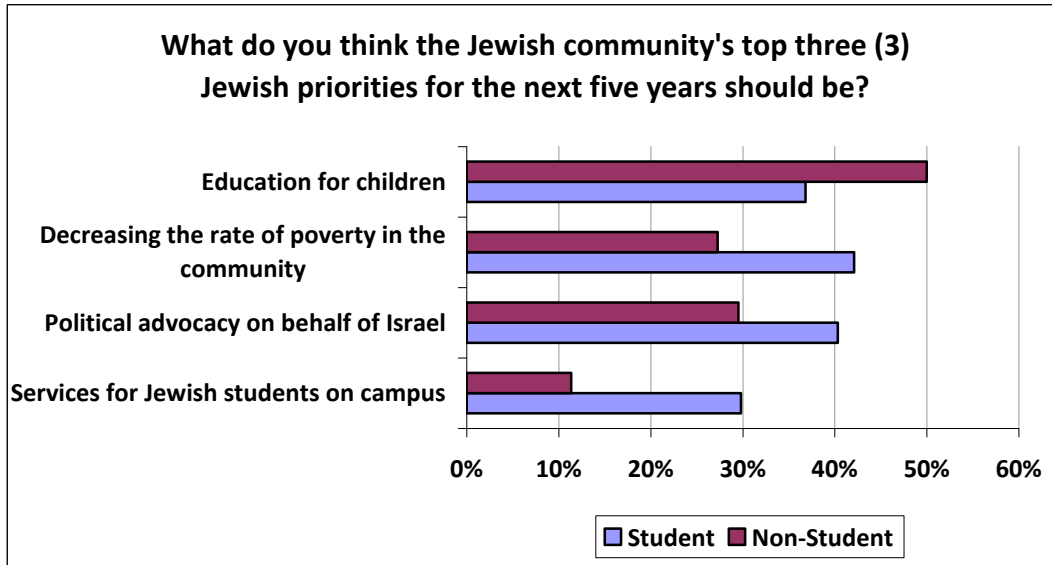


Communal Priorities

Respondents were asked what they think the Jewish community's top three priorities for the next five years should be. The graph presents the number of times a priority was chosen. *Fighting anti-Semitism* and *education for children* top the list.

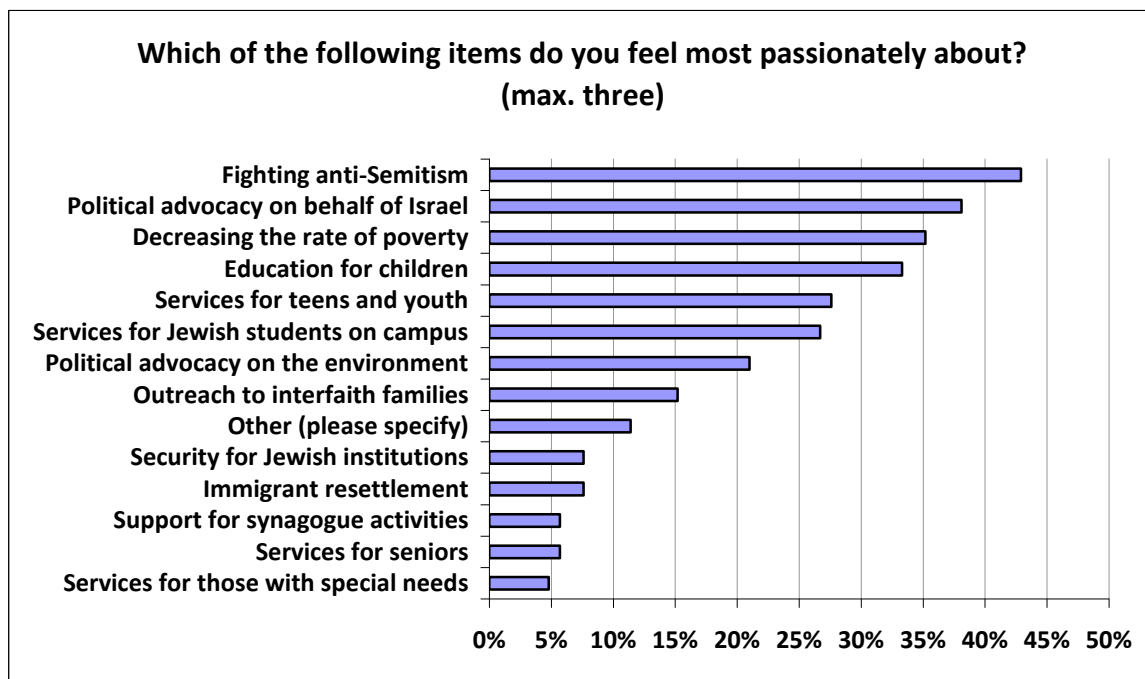


Responses to this question vary dependent on whether or not the respondent is a student. Students placed a greater emphasis on *services for Jewish students on campus*, *political advocacy on behalf of Israel*, and *decreasing the rate of poverty in the community*. Non-students stressed education for children – likely because they are more likely to have, or be thinking about, children at their later stage of life.



Passion

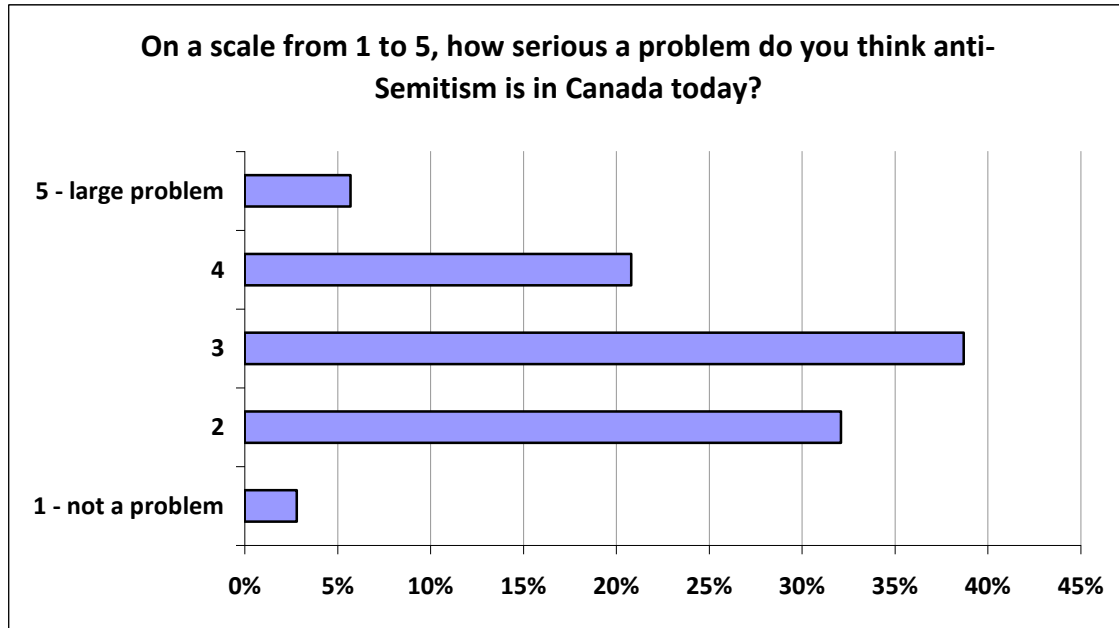
Respondents were asked what Jewish issues they feel most passionate about. Answers were very similar to the question above, with the exception of *political advocacy on behalf of Israel*, which moved up two ranks to swap with *education for children*.



Anti-Semitism

Respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 (not a problem) to 5 (large problem), how serious a problem they think anti-Semitism is in Canada today. The average

response of 2.95 indicates respondents' perspectives that the community still faces challenges. This assessment contrasts with respondents' earlier view that *fighting anti-Semitism* should be one of the community's top priorities in the next five years.



Respondents were asked to provide examples of anti-Semitic experiences that they or their friends have encountered in their lives. Responses ranged from relatively minor things, like Jewish jokes, to extremely dangerous violence. The three responses below exemplify the broad spectrum of answers

“Off the cuff comments and jokes about Jews that people either actually mean in a racist way or are just making a joke. Either way, it definitely upsets me.”

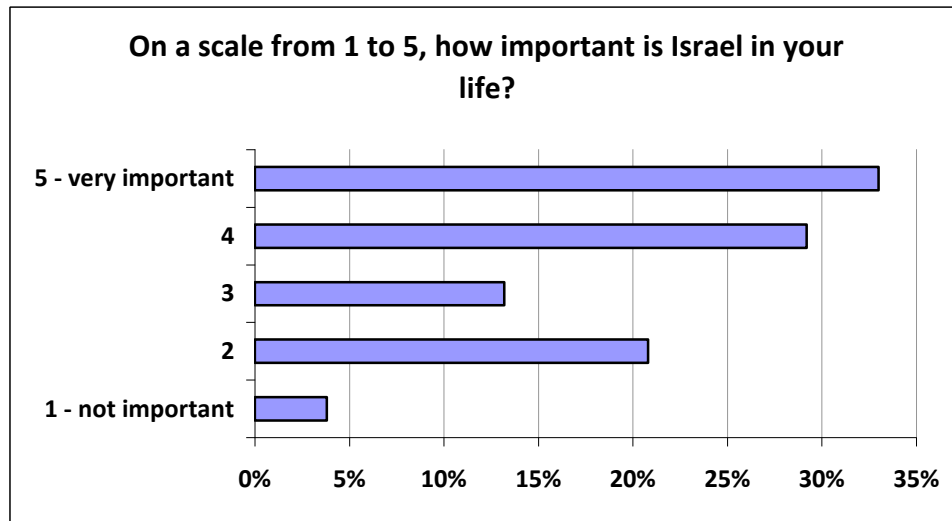
“I have been surrounded by people who constantly call their friends a “jew” negatively even though they're not jewish. My family van was spray painted with a swastika. I have never experienced a terrifying or extremely serious form of anti-semitism mainly because I try not to expose myself to those types of people.”

“My brother was beaten up by a gang of Asian high school students because he was identified as a student from a Jewish high school. They expressed anti-semitic slurs as they attacked him in the nearby shopping mall's food court and nobody from the public stepped in to stop the attack.”

Israel

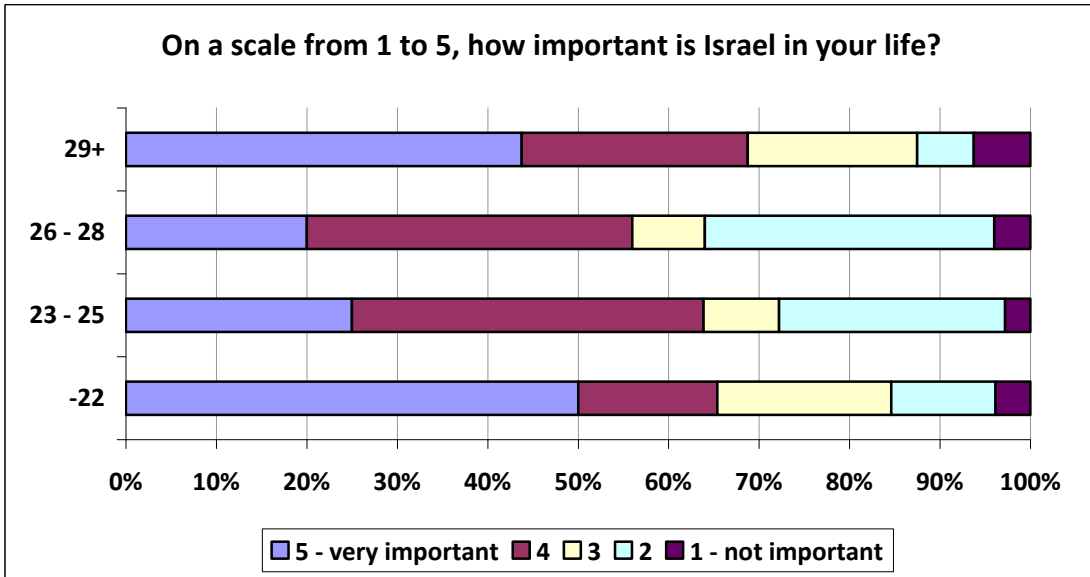
A disproportionate number of respondents to our survey have visited Israel at least once – 94%, likely because the sample was taken largely from the Birthright database. Of those that have travelled to Israel, 39% have gone once, 42% have gone 2 to 3 times, 11% have gone 4 – 5 times, and 8% have gone more than 5 times. For many, Birthright has not been the only trip to Israel respondents have taken.

Respondents were then asked to rank the importance of Israel in their lives on a scale of 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). With an average response of 3.668, results illustrate the strong bond that our respondents have with the country.

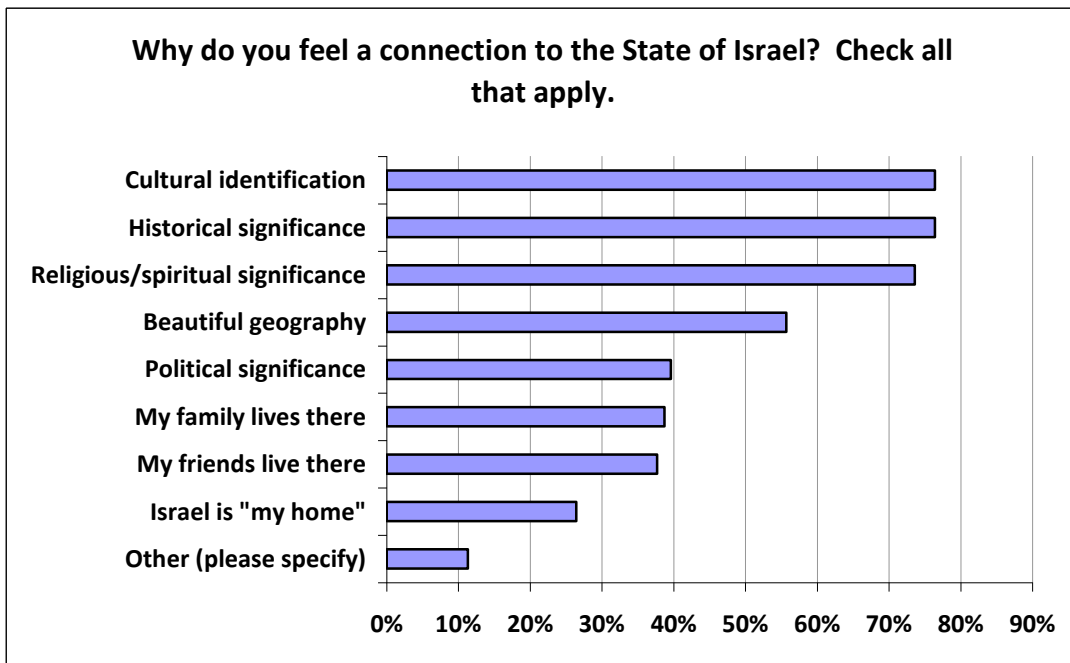


There was almost no difference between Birthright alumni and those who have not been on the trip.

The importance of Israel differs by age. As displayed on the graph below, those over 29 and those under 22 place more importance on Israel than those in the middle.

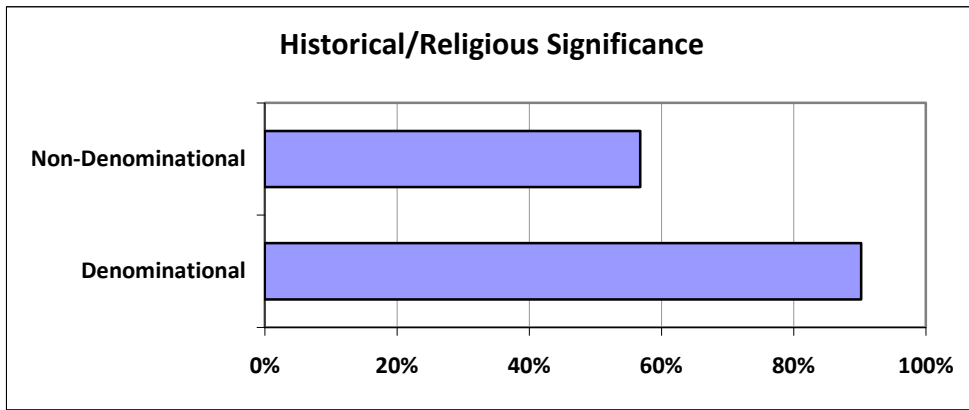


Respondents were asked for the reasons behind their connection with the State of Israel. Responses varied greatly, with many respondents selecting upwards of 3 reasons. *Cultural identification, historical significance and religious/spiritual significance*, were the three most popular with 76%, 76% and 74% of respondents selecting them respectively.



The only difference in responses when broken down by demographics was between respondents' denomination. 90% of respondents who grew up in denominational

homes selected historical/religious significance, while only 57% of non-denominational respondents did.



Implications

Jewish Identity

The Jewish identity of today's young adults varies considerably from that of their parents' generation. Young adults have less interest and put less emphasis on institutional Judaism (affiliation with established Jewish organizations or synagogues). They are more open in their Judaism and are involved in a wide range of groups and organizations, only some of which are Jewish. This study confirms what many other similar studies have revealed: Judaism is only one aspect of their identity, among many others. They are at a dynamic stage of growth and development and many factors can affect the place their Jewish identity has in their lives. On campus, many have a strong sense of Jewish identity and connection to Israel, but once they leave, involvement and connection drops off.

One indicator of this trend is that most of the respondents rated Jewish ritual practice and lifestyle issues less important than their parents. When compared to the results from the 2008 attitudinal study, these young adults rated belonging to a synagogue, joining Jewish organizations and dating someone Jewish far less important than older generations.

We can not assume from these results, that young people will be less involved in the community than their parents. Most are at a stage in their lives where they are open to many different possibilities and are not yet ready to commit to just the Jewish community. It is also interesting to note that when these respondents were asked what they thought the biggest barriers were to participation in the Jewish community, only 16% of respondents indicated lack of interest. Females were significantly more interested than males. The vast majority of young adults are eager to build at least some connection with the Jewish community. The challenge for the community is to develop the right gateways and opportunities to help them do so.

Communication

Young adults confirmed that email is the best method of communicating with them. The vast majority of young adults have and regularly check their email accounts. Facebook was the second most popular choice, but trailed far behind email. Note that these two methods are free to use.

More surprising were respondents' views on websites. Organizations spend significant resources on designing and maintaining websites, but only 25% of young adults consider websites a good means of communicating with them. This is important information for organizations in the community who are considering various internet tools to target

young adult. Not surprisingly, only a small percentage of the respondents indicated that print media such as newsletters or mail to be an effective method of communicating with them.

Programming

One of the limitations of this report is that the majority of respondents are attending some events organized in and by the Jewish community. Therefore the results do not provide us with a better understanding of the reasons why some young people do not attend any programs or events.

What is clear from the comments made by the respondents is that they want more programming options. They want more programs, more events, more activities, and more groups. Respondents were asked what kind of programming they currently attend, and what they'd like to see offered. Some have preferences for activity-based events (ie. going to Playland, hanging out at the beach, and playing sports), while others want more social events such as pub nights and the like. Some want Jewish education programs covering a range of topics. The overarching theme is that they feel underserved and are looking for more opportunities.

Today's young adults are more diverse in their needs, wants than ever before. As a result, they want programming that is more closely tailored to their individual identities. Respondents made specific requests for gay & lesbian groups and business groups, among others. If young adults are going to be engaged, we need to work with them to design and promote programs and events rather than plan for them.

Social Issues

The survey looked at young adults' attitudes on a variety of social issues, both Jewish and non-Jewish. When compared with the results from the attitudinal survey, young adults and adults place similar levels of importance on Jewish social issues, such as fighting anti-Semitism and education for children. However, in the realm of broader social issues, these respondents were particularly passionate about protecting the environment and defending human rights. It is unclear whether this group would have a higher level of engagement if there were Jewish-sponsored activities focusing on these issues, or whether they prefer being involved in mainstream organizations who are already actively involved in social action around human rights and the environment.

Israel

Young adults share a strong bond with the Land of Israel, one which the Birthright program has fostered, especially with the sample for this survey. Israel plays a strong role in their Jewish identities. The climate today on university campuses has required Jewish students who care about Israel to speak out against Israel's detractors. Many

Jewish youth have forged stronger alliances with Jewish organizations such as Federation, Canada Israel Committee and Canadian Jewish Congress as a result of being on the frontlines of the public debate over Israel and Mideast-related issues.

Survey respondents ranked support for Israel as the second most important issue to them. Additionally, many commented that they'd like to see more Israel-related programming specifically for young adults. Interestingly, the importance of support for Israel drops dramatically after students graduate, most likely because these young adults are now focusing on getting their careers off the ground and they are away from the university scene, where a lot of energy and attention is focused around Israel. One area of potential new programming for this age group is in the area of Israel advocacy.

Conclusion:

Appendix A: Young Adult Survey

Appendix B: Professions

Industry	Occupation
Accounting	Accounting
Business	Business Owner Communications Assistant Manager broker
Engineering	Engineer
Entertainment	Stage Manager Actor / Speech Language Pathologist Performing artist- dancer
Health Care	Occupational Therapist therapist kinesiology nurse's aide Resident Genetic Counsellor Researcher in Psychiatry
Hospitality	Wedding Planner Theatre Stage Manager, Hotel Banquet Server Cook Intern / waitress Hospitality
Journalism	journalist
Law	Articled student in law Law
Non-Profit	Development Assistant @ CFHU Fundraiser nonprofit
Office Assistant	Receptionist Receptionist Clerical

	Executive Assistant Administrative Assistant
Politics	Political aide.
Religious	Full-time cantor.
Retail	Retail Sales Associate
Social Services	Social Worker youth worker Social Services Career Counselling social work camp counselor Child Care
Teaching	ESL Teacher / Gym Manager Alternative Youth Education Children's visual arts programming Teacher High School Teacher Teacher
Technology	Computer Support Consultant - Tech sector
Trades	Co-op Automation Technologist
Other	Sustainability Program Coordinator communications and professional development program design Recreation Canada Post Security Guard Data Analyst